

Game of Thrones: 3. IMPACTOR(S)

Esther 4:13-17

August 5, 2018

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Does anyone know the Webster's definition of the word IMPACT? When one object forcibly comes into contact with another object, and one or both objects change direction Having a strong effect on someone or something...That's our message for today, how we IMPACT others, and ourselves – at home, at work, in our community, wherever we are. And we have a choice to make, to IMPACT...OR NOT to impact – and as God calls us as His disciples, how will we answer His call when He puts us in a place, in a situation?

This is a story of Robert Louis Stevenson, a 19TH Century Scottish Author. Tell the story of Robert, as a boy, watching the lamplighters light the gas street lamps in Scotland. Knocking holes in the darkness – that's IMPACT, isn't it? Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds that you plant That's IMPACT too, isn't it? Seeds we plant to help others grow, but it's also about how we continue to grow into the disciples Jesus calls us to be.

Today I'd like to focus on the book of Esther, namely Esther and Mordecai, and I want us to look at the IMPACT Esther had on King Xerxes and the community, but also, I want us to look at Mordecai's IMPACT – you see, sometimes we will be able to be an Esther IMPACTOR, but sometimes we will be called to be a Mordecai IMPACTOR...Only two books in the Bible are named after women, Esther, our learning for today, what is the other one? (Ruth) It's the story of a young heroin who risks everything to save her people. She lived in ancient Persia, and her parents died when she was young, she was left as an orphan but adopted by her older cousin, Mordecai. Mordecai worked in a minor role in the government in King Xerxes regimen.

As the story goes, there was a many day party, and at the end of the party, King Xerxes wanted his beautiful wife, Vashti to parade around in front of all the drunken people. Queen Vashti refused to do this, and this was the very beginning of the "Me Too" movement, so she had no one to help her out of this situation – so unfortunately, she was banished forever. So, King Xerxes holds a beauty pageant to pick his next Queen, and this young peasant girl, Esther, who no one knows is a Jew, is chosen to be the most beautiful woman in the land, and she is chosen to be his Queen. In the meantime, Mordecai uncovers a plot to kill the king, Mordecai tells Esther, who tells the King, and Mordecai gets the credit – this infuriates Hayman, a very high ranking official – who hates Jews, and now hates Mordecai. So, Hayman, comes up with this plot to kill a group of people he thinks are gaining too much power, and tells this story, and his idea to King Xerxes. Mordecai is outside the city gates, and he is mourning with others, who have now heard this rumor that all the Jews will be destroyed. So, word gets to Esther there is a plot to kill the Jews, so she sends people to Mordecai to find out what exactly is going on.

This is a powerful story of IMPACTORS, not just one, but of two IMPACTORS. There are two heroes in our story today, and we will explore a bit, how in our lives, we are called to IMPACT, in one way, or another...Esther reveals at a banquet, to the King, that she is a Jew and reveals Hayman's plan to destroy all the Jews, including her, and this catches King Xerxes off-guard. So, King Xerxes doesn't want his beautiful Queen killed,

so the King orders Haman to be hung, and dies in the place where Haman had planned to kill Mordecai. Mordecai is now promoted to the highest position in the land, and the Jews, because of Esther's courage, are granted protection.

So, let's think about the impact here, from two common, ordinary people, that God put in a place to do amazing work and to save God's people. But we ask, would God ever put us in a place like this to save many people? Truth is, God puts us in those places all the time...Sure it might not be in a palace, and we may not be Kings or Queens, **SOMETIMES GOD HAS DIVINE APPOINTMENTS FOR US TO BE OUT FRONT AS GOD'S IMPACT.** God, many times puts each of us in the right place, at the right time, and gives us the right words, and the right actions – **BUT YOU AND I HAVE TO BE READY TO TAKE THE RISK – AND MAKE THE IMPACT!** Esther was put in this place, at this time, for a reason, and God does the same thing with each of us. But our **IMPACT** moment is to ensure we don't miss the divine appointment. We can't miss an opportunity – we must be in tune with God.

We may think we are ordinary, we may think we are not the right person to solve a situation, but we must trust that God doesn't make mistakes. We must trust that God put us in the right place, at the right time, and that God needs us. We must trust that if God made the appointment for us, God will follow through with the agenda for us. We may think that God would never call on us in such situations, but he does every day. Think about your job, and dealing with people, **EVERYDAY**, we have an ability to make an **IMPACT.** **WE** many times can put **PEOPLE FIRST** – above profit, above strategy. In our schools where children today are being bullied, or shamed, we have an ability to help them. Out in public, we see the poor, the homeless, the marginalized, but do we say **YES** and act and reach out? Even in our church, where there may be misinformation, or rumor, or gossip, we can say **"YES"** and do the right thing. But there is another hero in this story of Esther, it is Mordecai. The one behind the scenes to help others to become the Esther **IMPACTOR** – being Mordecai is equally important, he helped Esther see it was the right time, she was the right person, helped her to be courageous and act. Sometimes God's appointment for us is to be Mordecai, and help someone else be an Esther **IMPACTOR**, being a Mordecai **IMPACTOR** is **EVERY BIT AS IMPORTANT AS AN ESTHER IMPACTOR.** Often, we will be called to be someone's Mordecai and not an Esther **IMPACTOR**...What would a sermon from an HR person be without competencies...?

So, as we look back at the **IMPACTS** that both Esther, and Mordecai made in today's story, I want to highlight five competencies they used to **IMPACT** the situation and change / save the lives of the Jewish people:

- **Courage** – its about courage, and grit, and say "yes", be the light that shines
- **Truth** – follows courage, once we have the courage to say yes, we need to be truthful
- **Witness** – John Wesley spoke about growing our faith by sharing our faith, putting the word of God into practice
- **Authenticity** – we need to make an impact by looking at our faith and where we came from, not by letting the world dictate how we impact
- **Influence** – pay attention to God's voice, and drown out the other influences around us

The last thing I want to say about Esther and Mordecai...in the book of Esther, God's name is **NEVER** mentioned, and yet His work is done...think about that, we shouldn't

have to be told to go help someone, help the marginalized and unprivileged, all we need to do is trust that God put us in a place, and He will give us what we need to make an IMPACT.

So, I want to fast forward to the 1950's / 1960's, and someone who displayed these five (5) competencies to make HUGE IMPACTS and changed the direction on many, Dr. Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement. Dr. King was working very hard on equality for everyone, and we remember his famous saying, "a person should be hired based upon their competencies, not based upon the color of their skin". Many don't know this, Billy Kyles, the longtime friend and associate of Dr. King, who was with him when he was shot in 1968, tells the story from 1957. He tells us that one night, in January 1957, Dr. King got up, while his wife and children were sleeping, he knelt at the kitchen table and prayed to God, telling God he just couldn't lead any more, he was tired, he was beaten down, and he told God, he no longer could "fight the fight", and couldn't lead anymore, he had nothing left. Well, as Billy told the story, Dr. King heard a voice, within him telling him to go forward, that God was with Dr. King, all the time, no matter what, and he would give him strength and inspiration to continue forward with his IMPACT. Think about what would have happened had Dr. King given up? Think about how different, and how far behind we would be had Dr. King not been committed to making an IMPACT, difference in the lives of all of us?

The second part of my Dr. King story is August 28, 1963, remember what happened that day? (Dream Speech on the Mall in Washington, DC). You see, Dr. King was not sure how many if anyone would show up at the rally. There was a speech written, not well, it was very unorganized, Dr. King had friends help him, but it was a tough message to write at the time. There was NOTHING written prior to the speech about "A Dream". A friend the day before told Dr. King, "just put your trust in the Holy Spirit, let Him guide you tomorrow, he won't let you down". Well, Dr. King started the speech, said a few words, and if you watch the video, you see him stumble a few minutes in, searching for words...you hear a faint voice to his left, he looks left, and there is Mahalia Jackson, and she yells, Tell them about the dream Martin, tell them about the dream" You see, he never spoke publicly about his dream before this day...so Dr. King launches into his speech about the dream, and gives, without a doubt, one of the most inspiring and IMPACTFUL messages that we have ever heard. Now in this story, although Dr. King had been a leader for many years, (an Esther IMPACTOR), on August 28TH, 1963, Mahalia Jackson was a Mordecai IMPACTOR, and played an even bigger role in moving Dr. King to give his Dream Speech.

One last modern-day IMPACTOR story, August 5, 2010. Sherry and I will be married (20) years this November, we have had many great times and moments over our years together, but if anyone asks me a highlight of our time together, it is August 5, 2010. I was coming home in a few days to go on vacation in Florida with Sherry, and (2) other couples, but I got a call at work, on my cell from Sherry. She was out doing some shopping for our vacation and went to a local Walmart in Orlando near our condo. She was driving through the parking lot, late morning, and saw a green station wagon (like the one Chevy Chase drove in the movie Vacation) and saw an older man with the driver door open eating something out of a can. She drove up slowly, rolled her window down and asked if he was ok or needed anything? He was eating Tuna Fish, out of a can in early August in Florida. He told her he has driven in from Mississippi, he had lost his job in a band (the station wagon was loaded down with music instruments), and he drove to Florida looking to make a fresh start. Sherry called me as she knew she needed to help

him, she went inside Walmart, bought him some food, some plastic utensils, paper towels, in the meantime I called St. Luke's United Methodist Church and Past Bill Barnes to get Bob a place at the Orlando Homeless Shelter for a few nights. Eventually Sherry got Bob some work at a restaurant (Owner is the Father of the children Sherry is a Nanny for in Florida). Bob eventually went to Canada to join his daughter, but Bob many times still calls us in August, and on Thanksgiving to thank us for helping him. He told Sherry, if not for her, he thinks he would not have lived. In this case, Sherry was the Esther IMPACTOR and I was her Mordecai.

Life is easy if we let it be. Two actions from our three stories today make sustaining IMPACTS for others, and to us

1 – A life of greatness is about a life of service

2 – Love, is the best form of currency we can give to anyone

Life is about SERVING and LOVING others, just as Jesus Christ did – you see, Jesus challenged the status quo at the time, He served, he loved – to many whom people would not associate with – He gave them HOPE.

A dear friend of mine passed away last year from St. Luke's in Orlando, FL, her name was Betty Wilson – she loved to serve, at Easter, at Christmas, she started Habitat for Humanity at St. Luke's, and about a month before she passed away, she wrote the following I found to be so profound: "We who believe the gospel to be true, recognize that our purpose for living is to allow God's love to flow through us in all of our relationships. Our days are empty, if they contain only busyness (cleaning, shopping, emails, etc.), OUR MOST MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES DEAL WITH PEOPLE AND SEEING TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS"

Love rolled the stone away on Easter Sunday morning, just as Jesus had promised. When that tomb was found empty, and Mary reported what she saw - Jesus before he ascended to heaven, it confirmed eternal life for us, and that the darkness will NEVER overcome the light. I go back to the beginning of today's message, it's all about us Knocking Holes in the Darkness.

When you are at a drive-thru, and you see the car behind you, with the Mom or Dad trying to take care of their kids and feed them – pay for them. When you are at the grocery store, and you see someone pushing their cart full of groceries, and the groceries are way too heavy, go to them, ask them, hey, let me load those groceries in your car for you. When you are out, and see your neighbor having a bad day, talk with them – show them love, show them Christ, serve them. We call these Intentional acts of Kindness, I prefer to call them Intentional Acts of Jesus. Every time we see someone and serve someone, we show them hope, and serve and love, them – We Knock Holes in the Darkness.

Great leaders make people around them better, Great DISCIPLES make people around them better – BY IMPACT

5-Competencies – COURAGE / TRUTH / WITNESS / AUTHENTICITY / INFLUENCE

2-Actions – SERVE / LOVE

I want to end today with a message by Erma Bombeck, (humorist / author who wrote about newspaper columns and books about suburban home life from the 1960's to the 1990's), as I thought this saying she had was one of her best...

SHOW SLIDE 9 (Erma Bombeck) – “When I stand before God at the end of my life, I hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, I used EVERYTHING you gave me”. Amen. Let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank you for this incredible story of Esther and Mordecai, we thank you for the stories of Dr. King and Mahalia, Billy Kyles, and Sherry, – you are still calling us to dream dreams, and to be IMPACTORS. Lord give us the spirit, and to trust in you that when you call us to be Esther or Mordecai IMPACTORS, we will say YES, and we will be a light that shines on and through others. Have thine own way Lord, have thine own way. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 5, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Holy God, we thank you for your providential grace at work in our lives. We need you. Come alongside us even when we think we already know what's best for us. Give us open hearts, wise minds, enthused spirits, and hands ready to serve you and your purposes in this world. Amen.

Monday, August 6

This week, we are inviting you to read the book of Esther. The story of Queen Esther is not found in 1st or 2nd Kings, as she is not a queen of Israel or Judah. Esther becomes Queen of Persia, a land that is foreign to the Jewish people. The book of Esther is an exciting, fast-paced story in which good triumphs and evil is destroyed. Esther is a powerful role model of courage and strength.

Scripture: Esther 1

This is what happened back when Ahasuerus lived, the very Ahasuerus who ruled from India to Cush—one hundred twenty-seven provinces in all. At that time, Ahasuerus ruled the kingdom from his royal throne in the fortified part of Susa. In the third year of his rule he hosted a feast for all his officials and courtiers. The leaders of Persia and Media attended, along with his provincial officials and officers. He showed off the awesome riches of his kingdom and beautiful treasures as mirrors of how very great he was. The event lasted a long time—six whole months, to be exact! After that the king held a seven-day feast for everyone in the fortified part of Susa. Whether they were important people in the town or not, they all met in the walled garden of the royal palace. White linen curtains and purple hangings were held up by shining white and red-purple ropes tied to silver rings and marble posts. Gold and silver couches sat on a mosaic floor made of gleaming purple crystal, marble, and mother-of-pearl. They served the drinks in cups made of gold, and each cup was different. The king made sure there was plenty of royal wine. The rule about the drinks was “No limits!” The king had ordered everyone serving wine in the palace to offer as much as each guest wanted. At the same time, Queen Vashti held a feast for women in King Ahasuerus' palace.

On the seventh day, when wine had put the king in high spirits, he gave an order to Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs who served King Ahasuerus personally. They were to bring Queen Vashti before him wearing the royal crown. She was gorgeous, and he wanted to show off her beauty both to the general public and to his important guests. But Queen Vashti refused to come as

the king had ordered through the eunuchs. The king was furious, his anger boiling inside. Now, when a need arose, the king would often talk with certain very smart people about the best way to handle it. They were people who knew both the kingdom's written laws and what judges had decided about cases in the past. The ones he talked with most often were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan. They were seven very important people in Persia and Media who, as the kingdom's highest leaders, were in the king's inner circle. So the king said to them, "According to the law, what should I do with Queen Vashti since she didn't do what King Ahasuerus ordered her through the eunuchs?"

Then Memucan spoke up in front of the king and the officials. "Queen Vashti," he said, "has done something wrong not just to the king himself. She has also done wrong to all the officials and the peoples in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. This is the reason: News of what the queen did will reach all women, making them look down on their husbands. They will say, 'King Ahasuerus ordered servants to bring Queen Vashti before him, but she refused to come.' This very day, the important women of Persia and Media who hear about the queen will tell the royal officials the same thing. There will be no end of put-downs and arguments. Now, if the king wishes, let him send out a royal order and have it written into the laws of Persia and Media, laws no one can ever change. It should say that Vashti will never again come before King Ahasuerus. It should also say that the king will give her royal place to someone better than she. When the order becomes public through the whole empire, vast as it is, all women will treat their husbands properly. The rule should touch everyone, whether from an important family or not."

The king liked the plan, as did the other men, and he did just what Memucan said. He sent written orders to all the king's provinces. Each province received it written in its own alphabet and each people received it in its own language. It said that each husband should rule over his own house.

Observation: King Xerxes rules from his royal throne in the palace complex of Susa. The king throws a week-long party for everyone living in Susa. On the seventh day of the party, he asks his servants to bring him Queen Vashti. He wants to show off her beauty to the guests and officials. Queen Vashti refuses to come. The king consults his expert advisors and they have the king pronounce a royal ruling stating that Vashti is insubordinate and thus is permanently banned from King Xerxes' presence.

Application: The theme of power recurs through the whole book. Notice in this chapter who has the power. Is it the King? His advisors? Queen Vashti? Of these characters, who has the wisdom and skill that accompany the exercising of true power?

Prayer: O God, who works in unexpected ways, grant me the power to see how, like Esther, you want to use me to impact this world. Help me to partner with you in making your dreams for this world become a reality. Amen.

Tuesday, August 7

Scripture: Esther 2

Sometime later when King Ahasuerus was less angry, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what he had decided about her. So his young male servants said, "Let the king have a search made for beautiful young women who haven't yet married. And let the king choose certain people in all the royal provinces to lead the search. Have them bring all the beautiful young women together to the fortified part of Susa, to the

women's house, to the care of Hegai the king's eunuch in charge of the women so that he might provide beauty treatments for them. Let the young woman who pleases you the most take Vashti's place as queen." The king liked the plan and implemented it. Now there was a Jew in the fortified part of Susa whose name was Mordecai, Jair's son. He came from the family line of Shimei and Kish; he was a Benjaminite. (Benjaminites had been taken into exile away from Jerusalem along with the group, which included Judah's King Jeconiah, whom Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar exiled to Babylon.) Mordecai had been a father to Hadassah (that is, Esther), though she was really his cousin, because she had neither father nor mother. The girl had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at. When her parents died, Mordecai had taken her to be his daughter. When the king's order and his new law became public, many young women were gathered into the fortified part of Susa under the care of Hegai. Esther was also taken to the palace to the care of Hegai, the one in charge of the women. The young woman pleased him and won his kindness. He quickly began her beauty treatments and gave her carefully chosen foods. He also gave her seven servants selected from among the palace servants and moved her and her servants into the nicest rooms in the women's house. (Esther hadn't told anyone her race and family background because Mordecai had ordered her not to.) Each day found Mordecai pacing back and forth along the wall in front of the women's house to learn how Esther was doing and what they were doing with her. According to the rules for women, the moment for each young woman to go to King Ahasuerus came at the end of twelve months. (She had six months of treatment with pleasant-smelling creams and six months with fragrant oils and other treatments for women.) So this is how the young woman would go to the king: They gave her anything that she asked to take with her from the women's house to the palace. In the evening she would go in, and the next morning she would return to the second women's house under the care of Shaashgaz. He was the king's eunuch in charge of the secondary wives. She would never go to the king again unless he was so pleased that he called for her by name. Soon the moment came for Esther daughter of Mordecai's uncle Abihail, whom Mordecai had taken as his own daughter, to go to the king. But she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch in charge of the women told her. (Esther kept winning the favor of everyone who saw her.)

Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, to his own palace, in the tenth month (that is, the month of Tevet) in the seventh year of his rule. The king loved Esther more than all the other women; she had won his love and his favor more than all the others. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her ruler in place of Vashti. The king held a magnificent, lavish feast, "the feast of Esther," for all his officials and courtiers. He declared a public holiday for the provinces and gave out gifts with royal generosity.¹⁹ When they gathered the young women to the second women's house, Mordecai was working for the king at the King's Gate. Esther still wasn't telling anyone her family background and race, just as Mordecai had ordered her. She continued to do what Mordecai said, just as she did when she was in his care.

Mordecai saves the king

At that time, as Mordecai continued to work at the King's Gate, two royal eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, became angry with King Ahasuerus. They were among the guards protecting the doorway to the king, but they secretly planned to kill him. When Mordecai got wind of it, he reported it to Queen Esther. She spoke to the king about it, saying the information came from Mordecai. The matter was investigated and found to be true, so the two men were impaled on pointed poles. A report about the event was written in the royal record with the king present.

Observation: The king appoints officials in every province of his kingdom to bring every beautiful young virgin to the harem in the palace complex of Susa. The girl who best pleases the king will be made queen in place of Vashti. Mordecai, an exiled Jew, who lives in the palace complex in Susa, is the guardian of his orphaned niece, Esther. She is very beautiful. When the king posts his order, many young girls are brought to the palace complex and given over to the overseer of the women. Mordecai brings Esther. The king falls in love with Esther. Esther keeps her Jewish background a secret from the king and his court. Mordecai, sitting at the King's Gate, overhears a plot to kill the king. Mordecai tells Esther who in turn tells the king. The conspirators are hanged, and Mordecai earns the King's favor.

Application: Again notice which characters have power and who are powerless. Notice the status and expectations of the women in the chapter. What choice does Esther, an orphan, a female and a minority have in her fate? Can you think of other times in history in which minority people are treated similarly? How were the situations resolved? How do these problems continue today?

Prayer: O God, thank you for people like Mordecai, who have mentored me, raised me up and provided wisdom and guidance in times of need. Grant me your wisdom and guidance this day so I will be a Mordecai to those I meet. Amen.

Wednesday, August 8

Scripture: Esther 3-4

Sometime later, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, Hammedatha the Agagite's son, by promoting him above all the officials who worked with him. All the royal workers at the King's Gate would kneel and bow facedown to Haman because the king had so ordered. But Mordecai didn't kneel or bow down. So the royal workers at the King's Gate said to Mordecai, "Why don't you obey the king's order?" Day after day they questioned him, but he paid no attention to them. So they let Haman know about it just to see whether or not Mordecai's words would hold true. (He had told them that he was a Jew.) When Haman himself saw that Mordecai didn't kneel or bow down to him, he became very angry. But he decided not to kill only Mordecai, for people had told him Mordecai's race. Instead, he planned to wipe out all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. In the first month (that is, the month of Nisan) in the twelfth year of the rule of King Ahasuerus, servants threw pur, namely, dice, in front of Haman to find the best day for his plan. They tried every day and every month, and the dice chose the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar).

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "A certain group of people exist in pockets among the other peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of everyone else, and they refuse to obey the king's laws. There's no good reason for the king to put up with them any longer. If the king wishes, let a written order be sent out to destroy them, and I will hand over ten thousand kikkars of silver to those in charge of the king's business. The silver can go into the king's treasuries."

The king removed his royal ring from his finger and handed it to Haman, Hammedatha the Agagite's son, enemy of the Jews. The king said to Haman, "Both the money and the people are under your power. Do as you like with them." So in the first month, on the thirteenth day, royal scribes were summoned to write down everything that Haman ordered. The orders were for the king's rulers and the governors in charge of each province, as well as for the officials of each people. They wrote in the alphabet of each province and in the language of each people. They wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus

and sealed the order with the king's royal ring. Fast runners were to take the order to all the provinces of the king. The order commanded people to wipe out, kill, and destroy all the Jews, both young and old, even women and little children. This was to happen on a single day—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar). They were also to seize their property. A copy of the order was to become law in each province and to be posted in public for all peoples to read. The people were to be ready for this day to do as the order commanded. Driven by the king's order, the runners left Susa just as the law became public in the fortified part of Susa. While the king and Haman sat down to have a drink, the city of Susa was in total shock.

When Mordecai learned what had been done, he tore his clothes, dressed in mourning clothes, and put ashes on his head. Then he went out into the heart of the city and cried out loudly and bitterly. He went only as far as the King's Gate because it was against the law for anyone to pass through it wearing mourning clothes. At the same time, in every province and place where the king's order and his new law arrived, a very great sadness came over the Jews. They gave up eating and spent whole days weeping and crying out loudly in pain. Many Jews lay on the ground in mourning clothes and ashes. When Esther's female servants and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, the queen's whole body showed how upset she was. She sent everyday clothes for Mordecai to wear instead of mourning clothes, but he rejected them.

Esther then sent for Hathach, one of the royal eunuchs whose job it was to wait on her. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was going on and why he was acting this way. Hathach went out to Mordecai, to the city square in front of the King's Gate. Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him. He spelled out the exact amount of silver that Haman promised to pay into the royal treasury. It was in exchange for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave Hathach a copy of the law made public in Susa concerning the Jews' destruction so that Hathach could show it to Esther and report it to her. Through him Mordecai ordered her to go to the king to seek his kindness and his help for her people. Hathach came back and told Esther what Mordecai had said.

In reply Esther ordered Hathach to tell Mordecai: "All the king's officials and the people in his provinces know that there's a single law in a case like this. Any man or woman who comes to the king in the inner courtyard without being called is to be put to death. Only the person to whom the king holds out the gold scepter may live. In my case, I haven't been called to come to the king for the past thirty days."

When they told Mordecai Esther's words, he had them respond to Esther: "Don't think for one minute that, unlike all the other Jews, you'll come out of this alive simply because you are in the palace. In fact, if you don't speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family."

Esther sent back this word to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa and tell them to give up eating to help me be brave. They aren't to eat or drink anything for three whole days, and I myself will do the same, along with my female servants. Then, even though it's against the law, I will go to the king; and if I am to die, then die I will." So Mordecai left where he was and did exactly what Esther had ordered him.

Observation: The King appoints Haman as the highest ranking official in the government and requires everyone to bow down to Haman. Mordecai refuses. So Haman finances a plot to eliminate all of the Jews since Mordecai is a Jew. Mordecai and all the Jewish people weep and mourn. Queen Esther gets word of the plot from one

of the palace eunuchs. Esther decides to go to the king and intercede and plead with him for her people; she and her servants fast for 3 days and she instructs Mordecai and all of the Jews to do the same.

Application: *“If you don’t speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family.”* (Esther 4:14) Have you ever found yourself in a situation that required speaking out against an injustice? What did you do? Did God place you there for such a time? How might you use your power wisely to correct a situation in the future?

Prayer: O God, who gives light in the midst of darkness, guard me from evil, arrogance, and pride like I see in Haman’s character. Sow seeds of peace where there is violence and hate so I can see there is always your light in the midst of darkness. Amen.

Thursday, August 9

Scripture: Esther 5-7

Three days later, Esther put on royal clothes and stood in the inner courtyard of the palace, facing the palace itself. At that moment the king was inside sitting on his royal throne and facing the palace doorway. When the king noticed Queen Esther standing in the entry court, he was pleased. The king held out to Esther the gold scepter in his hand, and she came forward and touched the scepter’s tip. Then the king said to her, “What is it, Queen Esther? What do you want? I’ll give you anything—even half the kingdom.” Esther answered, “If the king wishes, please come today with Haman for the feast that I have prepared for him.” “Hurry, get Haman,” the king ordered, “so we can do what Esther says.” So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. As they sipped wine, the king asked, “Now what is it you wish? I’ll give it to you. What do you want? I’ll do anything—even give you half the kingdom.” Esther answered, “This is my wish and this is what I want: If I please the king, and if the king wishes to grant my wish and my desire, I’d like the king and Haman to come to another feast that I will prepare for them. Tomorrow I will answer the king’s questions.”

That day Haman left Esther’s place happy, his spirits high, but then he saw Mordecai in the King’s Gate. Mordecai neither stood up nor seemed the least bit nervous around him, so Haman suddenly felt great rage toward Mordecai. But Haman held himself back and went on home. He sent word that his friends and his wife Zeresh should join him there. Haman boasted to them about his great wealth and his many sons. He told all about how the king had honored him by promoting him over the officials and high royal workers. “Best of all,” Haman said, “Queen Esther has invited no one else but me to join the king for food and drinks that she has prepared. In fact, I’ve been called to join the king at her place tomorrow! But all this loses its meaning every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King’s Gate.” So his wife Zeresh and all his friends told him: “Have people prepare a pointed pole seventy-five feet high. In the morning, tell the king to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then you can go with the king to the feast in a happy mood.” Haman liked the idea and had the pole prepared.

That same night, the king simply couldn’t sleep. He had the official royal records brought in, and his young male servants began reading them to the king. They came to the report about Mordecai informing on Bigthan and Teresh. (They were the two royal eunuchs among the guards protecting the king’s doorway, who secretly planned to kill King Ahasuerus.) “What was done to honor and reward Mordecai for this?” the king

asked. His young male servants replied, “Nothing was done for him, sir.” “Who is that out in the courtyard?” the king asked. (Haman had just entered the outer courtyard of the palace. He had come to tell the king to impale Mordecai on the pole that he had set up for him.) The king’s servants answered, “That’s Haman standing out in the courtyard, sir.” So the king said, “Have him come in.” When Haman entered, the king asked him, “What should be done for the man whom the king really wants to honor?” Haman thought to himself, Whom would the king really want to honor more than me? So Haman said to the king, “Here’s what should be done for the man the king really wants to honor. Have servants bring out a royal robe that the king himself has worn and a horse on which the king himself has ridden. It should have a royal crest on its head. Then hand over the robe and the horse to another man, one of the king’s officials. Have him personally robe the man whom the king really wants to honor and lead him on the horse through the city square. As he goes, have him shout, ‘This is what the king does for the man he really wants to honor!’” Then the king said to Haman, “Hurry, take the robe and the horse just as you’ve said and do exactly that for Mordecai the Jew, who works at the King’s Gate. Don’t leave out a single thing you’ve said!” So Haman took the robe and the horse and put the robe on Mordecai. He led him on horseback through the city square, shouting as he went, “This is what the king does for the man he really wants to honor!” Afterward, Mordecai returned to the King’s Gate, while Haman hurried home feeling great shame, his head covered. Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Both his friends^[b] and his wife said to him, “You’ve already begun to lose out to Mordecai. If he is of Jewish birth, you’ll not be able to win against him. You are surely going to lose out to him.” They were still discussing this with him when several royal eunuchs arrived. They quickly hurried Haman off to the feast that Esther had prepared.

When the king and Haman came in for the banquet with Queen Esther, the king said to her, “This is the second day we’ve met for wine. What is your wish, Queen Esther? I’ll give it to you. And what do you want? I’ll do anything—even give you half the kingdom.” Queen Esther answered, “If I please the king, and if the king wishes, give me my life—that’s my wish—and the lives of my people too. That’s my desire. We have been sold—and my people—to be wiped out, killed, and destroyed. If we simply had been sold as male and female slaves, I would have said nothing. But no enemy can compensate the king for this kind of damage.” King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is this person, and where is he? Who would dare do such a thing?” Esther replied, “A man who hates, an enemy—this wicked Haman!” Haman was overcome with terror in the presence of the king and queen. Furious, the king got up and left the banquet for the palace garden. But Haman stood up to beg Queen Esther for his life. He saw clearly that the king’s mood meant a bad end for him. The king returned from the palace garden to the banquet room just as Haman was kneeling on the couch where Esther was reclining. “Will you even molest the queen while I am in the house?” the king said. The words had barely left the king’s mouth before covering Haman’s face with dread. Harbona, one of the eunuchs serving the king, said, “Sir, look! There’s the stake that Haman made for Mordecai, the man who spoke up and did something good for the king. It’s standing at Haman’s house—seventy-five feet high.” “Impale him on it!” the king ordered. So they impaled Haman on the very pole that he had set up for Mordecai, and the king’s anger went away.

Observation: Queen Esther invites Haman for dinner with the king two nights in a row. After the first night, Haman builds gallows to begin the massacre. During the second dinner Esther exposes Haman’s plot and the king has Haman hung on his own gallows.

Application: Esther uses her circumstances not to further herself, but to aid her people. Her story is an account of salvation of a people. Read John 3:16-18. This is a summary of the Christian story of salvation contained in the Gospels. How was God at work in your life and you did not realize it until much later?

Prayer: O God, who conquered death, conquer my fears that often leave me paralyzed with the fear of change. Be that force within me that will dare to dream of what you have in store for this world. Help me to live abundantly and live the life you encourage me to live. Amen.

Friday, August 10

Scripture: Esther 8-10

That same day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther what Haman the enemy of the Jews owned. Mordecai himself came before the king because Esther had told the king that he was family to her. The king took off his royal ring, the one he had removed from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. Esther put Mordecai in charge of what Haman had owned. Esther again spoke before the king. She bowed at his feet, wept, and begged him to treat her kindly. She wanted him to overturn the evil plot of Haman the Agagite—his secret plan directed against the Jews. The king held out the gold scepter to Esther, and she got up and stood before him. She said, “If the king wishes, and if I please him—that is, if the idea seems right to the king, and if he still sees me as a good person—then have people write something to call back the order—the order that put into effect the plan of Haman, Hammedatha the Agagite’s son, that he wrote to destroy the Jews in all the royal provinces. How can I bear to watch the terrible evil about to sweep over my people? And how can I bear to watch others destroy my own family?”

King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Look, I’ve given Esther everything Haman owned. And Haman himself my servants have impaled on the pole because he planned to attack the Jews. So you yourselves write to the Jews whatever you like in the name of the king and seal the letters with the king’s royal ring. Anything written in the name of the king and sealed with the king’s royal ring can’t be called back.” So that was when the royal scribes were summoned—on the twenty-third day of the third month (that is, the month of Sivan). They wrote exactly what Mordecai ordered to the Jews, rulers, governors, and officials of the provinces from India to Cush—one hundred twenty-seven in all. They wrote in the alphabet of each province and in the language of each people. They wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed the order with the king’s royal ring. He sent letters with riders mounted on royal horses bred from mares known to run fast. The order allowed Jews in each town to join together and defend their lives. The Jews were free to wipe out, kill, and destroy every army of any people and province that attacked them, along with their women and children. They could also take and keep anything their attackers owned. The one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus on which they could do so was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar). A copy of the writing was to become law in each province and be on public display for all its peoples to read. The Jews were to be ready on this day to get back at their enemies. The riders mounted on royal horses left Susa, spurred on by the king’s order, and the law also became public in the fortified part of Susa. Mordecai went out from the king’s presence in a blue and white royal robe wearing a large gold crown and a white and red-purple coat. The city of Susa greeted him with shouts of joy. For the Jews it was a day of light, happiness, joy, and honor. In every province and in every town—wherever the king’s order and his law arrived—for

the Jews it was a day of happiness and joy. For them it meant feasts and a holiday. Many people in the land became Jews themselves, out of fear of the Jews.

It was on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar) that the king's order and his law were to be enforced. On the very day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to overpower them, the tables were turned against them. The Jews overpowered their enemies instead. The Jews joined together in their towns in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to defend themselves against those who tried to harm them. No one was able to stand in their way because everyone was afraid of the Jews. All the leaders of the provinces, rulers, governors, and those in charge of the king's business helped the Jews because they were afraid of Mordecai. Because Mordecai was very important in the palace, news about him was sweeping through the provinces. Indeed, Mordecai was becoming more and more important every day. The Jews put down all their enemies with sword blows, killing, and destruction. They did whatever they wanted with those who hated them. In the fortified part of Susa, the Jews killed five hundred people. They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha. These were the ten sons of Haman, Hammedatha's son, the enemy of the Jews. But the Jews didn't lay a hand on anything their enemies owned. That same day, a report concerning the number killed in the fortified part of Susa reached the king. So the king said to Queen Esther in the fortified part of Susa, "The Jews have killed five hundred people as well as the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the royal provinces? What do you wish now? I'll give it to you. What is your desire? I'll do it this time too." Esther answered, "If the king wishes, let the Jews who are in Susa also have tomorrow to do what the law allows for today. And let them also impale the ten sons of Haman on pointed poles." The king ordered that this be done, and the law became public in Susa. They impaled the ten sons of Haman just as she said. The Jews in Susa joined together again, this time on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar. In Susa, they killed three hundred people, but they didn't lay a hand on anything the people owned. The Jews out in the royal provinces also joined together to defend their lives. They put to rest the troubles with their enemies and killed those who hated them. The total was seventy-five thousand dead, but the Jews didn't lay a hand on anything their enemies owned. They acted on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. Then on the fourteenth day they rested, making it a day of feasts and rejoicing. (The Jews in Susa joined together for self-defense on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the month. But they rested on the fifteenth day of the month and made it a day of feasts and joyous events.) That is why Jews who live in villages make the fourteenth day of the month of Adar a day of rejoicing and feasts, a holiday. It is a day on which they send gifts of food to each other.

Mordecai wrote these things down and sent letters to all the Jews in all the provinces, both near and far, of King Ahasuerus. He made it a rule that Jews keep the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as special days each and every year. They are the days on which the Jews finally put to rest the troubles with their enemies. The month is the one when everything turned around for them from sadness to joy, and from sad, loud crying to a holiday. They are to make them days of feasts and joyous events, days to send food gifts to each other and money gifts to the poor. The Jews agreed to continue what they had already begun to do—just what Mordecai had written to them. Indeed, Haman, Hammedatha the Agagite's son, the enemy of all the Jews, had planned to destroy the Jews. He had servants throw pur (that is, the dice) to find the best month and day to trouble greatly and destroy them. But when Esther came before the king, his written order said: The wicked plan that Haman made against the Jews should turn back on him instead. So they impaled him and his sons on pointed poles. That is

why people call these days Purim, by using the ancient word *pur*. It all fit with what this letter said, with what they saw happen, and with what they themselves went through. The Jews agreed that they, their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, as well as all non-Jews who become Jews, should always keep these two days. They agreed to follow the written rules—and at the proper time too—every year. So forever every family, province, and town remembers to keep these days. These days of Purim won't die out among the Jews. They will remember to keep them forever. Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with her full royal power to show that this second letter about Purim was correct. Letters conveying good wishes and words of friendship were sent to all the Jews throughout the one hundred twenty-seven provinces in the kingdom of Ahasuerus. Their aim was to make sure that the Jews kept these days of Purim at the proper time, following the rule that Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had made. The rule fit well with what they themselves had agreed to do forever and with other things they did—like fasting and lamenting. Esther's order made these features of Purim part of the law, so it was written down.

King Ahasuerus taxed the entire kingdom, including the islands of the Mediterranean. Now some may want to know about all the king's mighty, great deeds. They may also want a full report about how important Mordecai became after the king honored him. Are they not written in the official records of the kings of Media and Persia? Certainly, Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus in importance. The Jews also admired him greatly, and his many brothers and sisters were proud of him. He always wanted to do good things for his Jewish people and to speak up for all his family whenever they needed help.

Observation: Esther appoints Mordecai over Haman's estate. The king authorizes all of the Jews in the city to defend themselves against threat, which they do. Mordecai is given clothes of royalty. The Jewish people agree to never forget the story of Queen Esther. They celebrate Purim annually in the spring to commemorate this courageous woman.

Application: Esther transforms from a passive girl into a powerful, wise and skilled heroine. The key word in last Sunday's message was "impact." We all have opportunities to impact the people and the world around us. It may not be as Esther did, but how is God calling you or using you to be an "impactor."

Prayer: O God, who gives strength to the weak and power to the powerless, give me the courage this day to live as your child, to let your light shine through me, and to impact the world around me. Amen.

Saturday, August 11

Scripture: Matthew 5:43-48

"You have heard that it was said, *You must love your neighbor* and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don't

even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.

Observation: The words “love your neighbor and hate your enemy” are not found in the Old Testament, but the words must have been a common expression in the first century. The words express an attitude present even today. It is easy to love those who love me. I don’t need Jesus to help me do that. But to “love your enemies and pray for those who harass you,” I need Jesus in me to be able to rise to this level of relating to the world around me. Oh, what a witness this would be!

Application: What a radical proclamation of love found in this teaching of Jesus to his followers! Jesus will show with his life that true love is strong and transformative. It is also not what the world expects. These verses go far beyond what we have read this week from Esther, chapter 9. Does love still work as a force for good in a world where violence is prevalent?

Prayer: Your love, O God, knows no bounds. Your love has the power to make us one. Grant me the assurance that your love is real and for all the world. Draw me close and prepare me for your next great work of love. Amen.